Economic Development

Existing Conditions

The Addison County Regional Planning Commission created the Economic Development Chapter jointly within its partner agency, Addison County Economic Development (ACEDC) to coordinate our planning and economic development goals. Much of the data and structure of this chapter and supporting appendix is intended to mirror the work developed within the West Central Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND WORKFORCE

The demographics of the Addison Region population has shifted significantly. In just the decade between 2013 and 2023, the largest age group switched from 45- to 54-year-olds to 55- to 64-year-olds, with the average age increasing from 42.3 to 44, an upward trend that has persisted for decades and is likely to continue.[1] This shift is resulting in a shrinking workforce as fewer young people are available to enter the workforce and a growing number are either retired or will retire soon (Figure 2).

The racial make-up of the Region has also shifted in recent years. While the majority group has remained "white monoracial," this population has actually decreased by 3.41% since 2013. All other racial groups increased during this period leading to a doubling of the People of Color (POC) community. Now, POC make up 12.02% of the population compared to 6.25% in 2013.[2] While racial diversity has increased substantially, the Addison Region's racial demographics remain significantly more homogenous than the nation as a whole (**Figure 2**).

EDUCATION

Educational attainment in Addison County, and Vermont generally, exceed the rest of the country, especially

Figure 1: Addison County Population by Age (1975 and 2022)

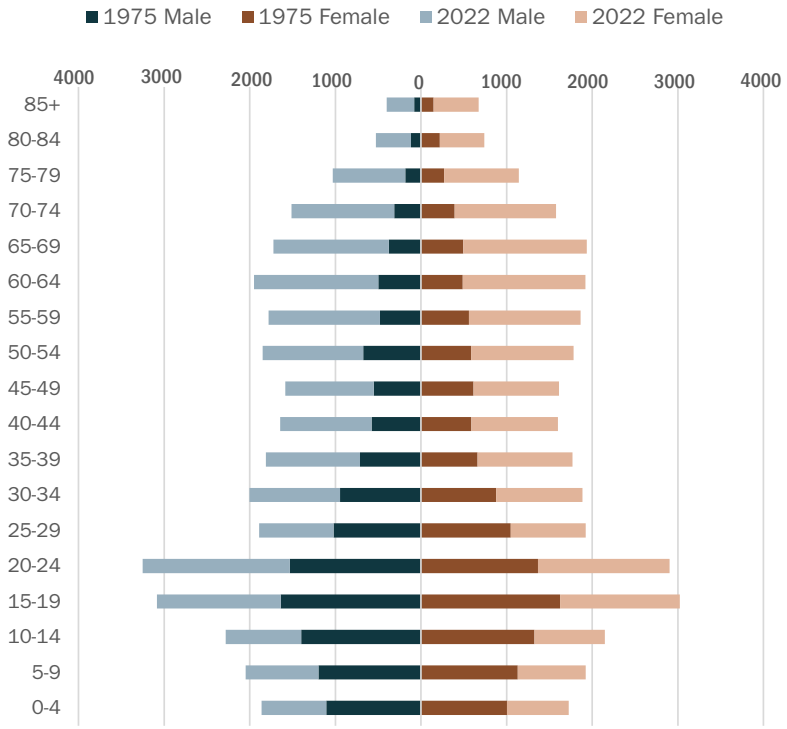
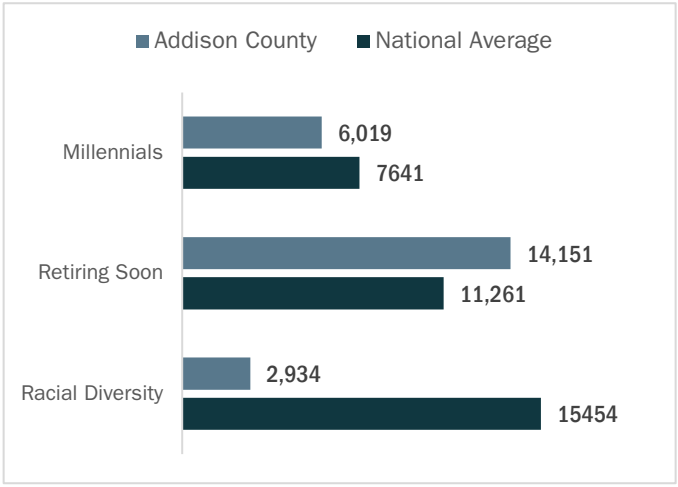


Figure 2: Targeted Demographics, October 2025



when comparing high school graduation rates for the adult population over 25, which stands at 89.8% in the US, 94.5% in Vermont, and 95.1% in Addison County.[3] The County tends to perform at similar rates to the rest of Vermont in higher education attainment with 24.3% of adults in both Addison County and statewide holding bachelor's degrees and 17.5% of Addison County adults holding master's degrees compared to 17.4% in Vermont.[4]

As Vermont's population stagnates, K-12 class sizes have shrunk, leading several elementary schools to shut down completely. This has been exacerbated by rising education costs. In Addison County, Addison Central School closed in 2022 followed more recently by Ripton Elementary School in 2025. Closure of Ferrisburgh Central School was also considered, but voters ultimately decided to keep it running in 2019. These retired school buildings are now being repurposed into community centers as planning efforts commence to evaluate their highest and best uses for the future. These large facilities present considerable challenges to the communities who take ownership of them and become responsible for their maintenance, repair, future use, and potential redevelopment. However, they also provide opportunities to strengthen an area's economic development and community cohesion. With an aging population and lowering birth rates, Vermont and our Region will continue to grapple with this issue in the coming years.

See Chapter 4: Community Infrastructure, pages 34-39.



INCOME

The median household income (MHI) of Addison County was $88,478 in 2023 which was $7,267 higher than the Vermont MHI and $10,759 higher than the US MHI. However, mean income in Addison County was $107,877, only $1,946 higher than Vermont and $1,283 less than the US mean.[5] Since higher mean income, as compared to median income, is generally driven by a few very high earning individuals, the fact that Addison County's median and mean incomes are relatively close, speaks favorably on the distribution of wage rates in the Region.

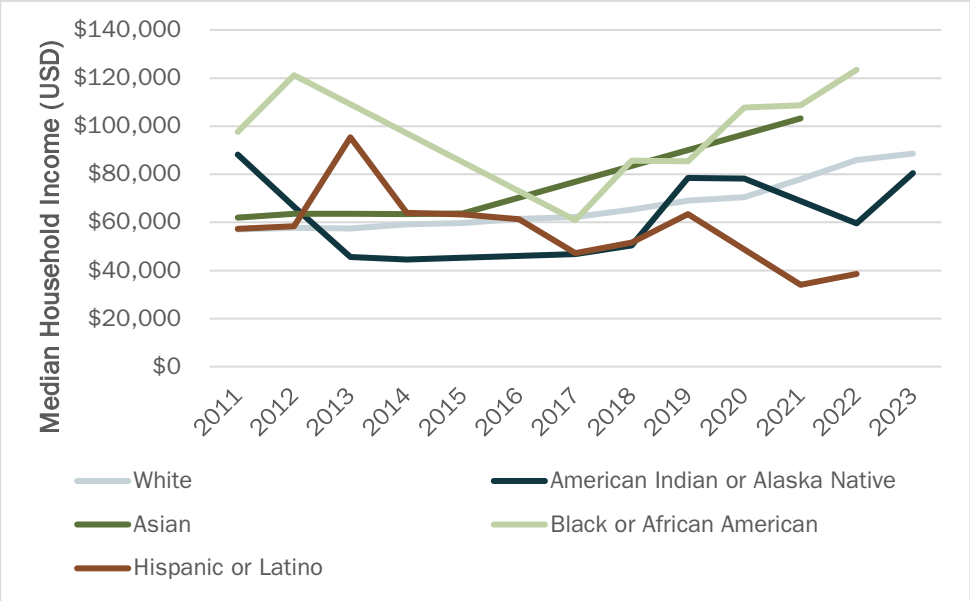
This analysis is consistent with the Gini Index, a widely used measurement of inequality. A Gini index value represents how equitable wealth distribution is on a scale from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality). As of 2022, Vermont had a score of 0.45 while the United States had a score of 0.486. The slight difference is rather significant on the Gini Index. The United Nation's defines 0.4-0.5 as relative inequality, and anything above 0.5 severe inequality. However, both Vermont and the US had a rise in scores by about .03 since 2006 when the data was first collected at the State level.[6] This indicates an overall trend towards income inequality.

PAY GAPS

In Addison County, the "female median income" was 20.40% less than the "male median income" in the 2023 Census. Although substantial, this difference changed drastically from 2013's 33.49% gap. On the other hand, Vermont's gender pay gap went from 24.55% in 2013 to 16.38% in 2023 – a smaller improvement, but a better outcome. The country's gender pay gap has been far more stubborn: 28.98% in 2013 to 27.52% in 2023. Addison County has ample room for improvement compared to the rest of the State in overcoming gender income inequality, though the County has performed well relative to the nation.[7]

The gender pay gap has many complicating factors. The difference in pay can be attributed to general prejudice, as well as cultural differences. The types of occupations women tend to pursue, and the likelihood of women to demand higher pay or promotion, both affect this gap. It is also important to acknowledge the unpaid labor traditionally performed by women

Figure 3: Median Household Income (MHI) by Race in Addison County



such as housework and childcare are not accounted for in the pay gap.

Due to the historically low rates of racial diversity in Addison County, the data presented in **Figure 3** is likely to be skewed and should be viewed critically. Small sample sizes can experience great changes that do not necessarily reflect the reality of the population. The conclusion that racial pay discrimination does not exist for certain groups should not be drawn from this data. A reliable source of racial pay disparity data is not likely to exist at the county level.

POVERTY

The Region maintains relatively low rates of poverty. At 7.4%, Addison County's poverty rate falls below the statewide rate of 9.7% and the national rate of 12.5%. Census data for racial disparity in poverty is more stable than that of income. While the White, non-Hispanic population has a poverty rate slightly below the average at 7%, other racial groups are in the double digits: 18.8% Black or African American, 10.6% Two or More Races, and 25.4% Hispanic or Latino.[8]

Similarly, Addison County performs well when comparing the proportion of earners making up to 300% of the poverty rate wage threshold: 34.81% in Addison County, 37.54% in Vermont, and 44.21% in the US.[9] This is a measurement widely used to demonstrate financial insecurity and often determines eligibility for federal aid programs. which explains the correlation with federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipient data: 8.6% of Addison County households receive SNAP benefits compared to 10% in Vermont and 12.2% in the United States.[10]

Vermont has a minimum wage comparable to that of other states at $14.01. This rate has had a notable increase of 53% in the past decade.[11] This is well above $7.73, the poverty wage for two working adults with two children in Addison County, as well as $7.52, the poverty wage for one working adult with no children in Addison County. However, the living wage for the former group is $34.75 and $24.51 for the latter.[12] This is a similar case for the State as a whole. Vermont's cost of living has increased substantially in recent years with per capita Personal Consumption Expenditures – the average total expenses per Vermonter – increasing 34% from 2020 to 2024. This is nearly equivalent to the 2004 to 2020 rate of increase, representing an acceleration in rising costs.[13] Though wages have also increased greatly, they have not kept pace with the cost of living, leaving many families behind.



DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Those who do not participate in the workforce are important potential economic contributors as well as societal indicators. While 64.2% of Addison County residents participate in the workforce, a relatively high percentage compared to national averages, that leaves 35.8% that do not. Different people cannot or choose not to work for a myriad of reasons. Children remain in school, the elderly have retired, and many others face permanent or temporary challenges that keep them from working. Poverty, homelessness, addiction, disability, and health can all disenfranchise people from the workforce. Creating paths to enfranchise and enable these populations to join the workforce benefits a community and its economy.

Homelessness

Vermont has the 5th highest rate of homelessness per capita in the country. In Addison County, 78 people in 59 households were experiencing homelessness during the 2023 Point-In-Time count. While this number is below the 2021 peak of 117, it represents a consistently elevated rate of housing insecurity in the area. Several groups such as sexual and domestic violence survivors, people of color, veterans, and those struggling with mental illness are more likely to be unhoused, posing further detriments to marginalized populations.[14]

The unhoused population has largely been supported by the State's hotel-motel voucher program, however, this COVID-era program was discontinued for the majority of participants due to concerns about high costs and ineffectiveness in combatting the root of homelessness. There are several alternative temporary housing shelters in the region: John Graham Shelter in Vergennes has 16 family beds and 16 adult-only beds; Charter House Coalition in Middlebury has 26 beds; Counseling Service of Addison County in Middlebury has nine beds including one family.[15] However, waitlists are often extensive for these facilities.

For more information regarding the housing crisis and the rising unhoused population, see pages 7-8 (Infrastructure/Housing) and Chapter 5: Population and Housing.



Substance Misuse

Substance misuse is both a contributor and a symptom of homelessness. This issue worsened significantly during the COVID pandemic. This not only affects the social well-being of a community, but also the productivity through "turnover and absenteeism, poor school performance, and increased costs related to public assistance and criminal justice."[16]

Homelessness and substance misuse are just two symptoms of a broad barrier to social and economic vitality of a community. Along with other societal ills – addiction, domestic abuse, discrimination, targeted hate – homelessness and substance misuse sideline potential consumers, cause departures from the workforce, and contribute to a decline in worker health.

DISABILITY

15.5% of Addison County residents self-identify as having a disability according to the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) performed by the US Census Bureau.[17] This exceeds both the state level, by 1.2%, and the country's level, by 1.9%. This number increased by nearly 3% during the period 2013 to 2023.[18] This correlates to the increase in average age of the Region's population, which potentially explains the changes.

Definitions of disability range broadly and drastically affect the data. The self-selection of a disability characteristic, as done in the ACS, obscures data comparison and disability standards. However, self-identification more closely aligns with the social model of disability, rather than the medical model, which better reflects the reality of disability: "a complex interaction between a person and [their] environment."[19]

Using the same Census Bureau data, those with a disability are less likely to be in the labor force with a 47.5% labor force participation rate, and less likely to be employed with 4.6% unemployment rate.[20] These higher rates represent untapped workforce potential during a labor shortage. It also indicates a possible misalignment between employers and the disabled population in terms of worker needs, further demonstrating the complex perception of disability.

HEALTH

Health and healthcare significantly impact economic development, as workforce health and healthcare costs shape local economies. In Addison County, health outcomes and factors—measured by the County Health Rankings—are slightly better than Vermont's average and above the national level.[21] Nonetheless, challenges remain: 10% of adults recently reported poor physical health for two weeks or more, 15% cited poor mental health, and 33% experience loneliness at least sometimes. Chronic diseases like diabetes, COPD, and cancer are on the rise.[22] Issues such as costly childcare, housing shortages, income disparities, and long commutes further affect community health.

Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate the impact health and health-related jobs have on the Region's economy. Nursing is one of the most sought after skills and rapidly growing needs of the Region.

Healthcare access is mixed; while Porter Medical Center offers strong services through its affiliation with a larger network, residents face difficulties due to short-

Figure 4: Addison County Active Job Advertising in 2024 and 2025

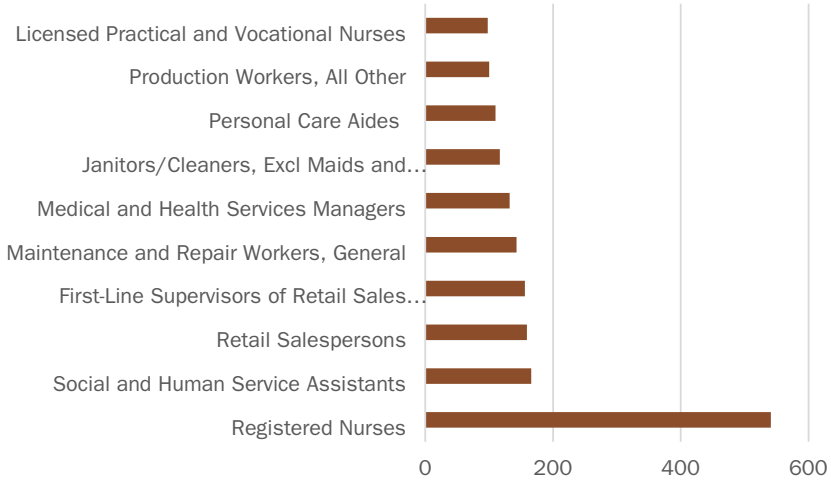


Figure 5: Job Posting Analytics for Top In-Demand Skills in Addison County

Skills	Postings	% of Total Postings	Profiles	% of Total Profiles	Projected Skill Growth	Skill Growth Relative to Market
Merchandising	1052	0.07	111	1%	15.0%	Growing
Nursing	789	0.05	74	1%	20.1%	Rapidly Growing
Cash Register	620	0.04	38	0%	21.4%	Rapidly Growing
Auditing	606	0.04	135	2%	21.8%	Rapidly Growing
Housekeeping	548	0.04	17	0%	13.3%	Growing
Food Safety And Sanitation	526	0.04	29	0%	11.7%	Growing
Inventory Management	476	0.03	151	2%	12.6%	Growing
Finance	467	0.03	190	2%	27.3%	Rapidly Growing
Food Services	465	0.03	61	1%	16.4%	Growing
Effective Communication	431	0.03	15	0%	0.0%	Neutral

ages in primary care and psychiatry, long waitlists, and high insurance costs, which strain employers, businesses, and families.

The same is true for aging facilities. The recent opening of the Vergennes Grand Senior Living facility marked a huge improvement in housing and healthcare, with a total of 88 beds becoming available. Elder care services are becoming increasingly in demand as the population ages. While many people receiving these services are retired, the families that take care of them are of working age. By freeing up their time, and freeing up housing for new Vermonters, the workforce can grow.

Economy

Addison County's Gross Domestic Production (GDP) was $2,156,287,000 as of 2023, making up 5.04% of Vermont's total GDP.[23] While GDP is a helpful measure in many regards (e.g. economic activity, comparative growth), it has many limitations. Factors like environmental externalities, population health, and home labor are not accounted for within the measurement. There are a number of more recently developed economic growth measures, however, these are typically designed on an international scale.

The Region's unemployment rate is among the lowest in the State at 2.2% as of June 2025.[24] The labor force participation rate was 64.2%, 2% higher than the country, but 0.7% lower than the state average.[25] The size of the labor force was 20,649 in 2023 which is an increase from 2011 by just 6 people, demonstrating the stagnant condition of Addison County's population.[26]

To further demonstrate the conditions of Addison County's economy, this section will contain the following subsections: Employment by Supersector, Commuting Patterns, Tax Receipts, and Opportunity Zones.

EMPLOYMENT BY SUPERSECTOR

By far, the human services industry, including educational services, health care, and social assistance, employs the most people in Addison County. At 4,375, this supersector makes up 28.44% of the Region's jobs, reflecting three of the four largest employers of the County: Middlebury College, Porter Medical Center, and Counseling Services of Addison County.[27] The largest employer, Collins Aerospace, represents the second largest supersector, manufacturing. Following close behind are retail trade and construction industries.

This has been the trend for the past few decades, with a larger trend up in Health Care and Social Assistance as well as Educational Services. There has also been a slight uptick in the Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting Industry, however, the number of farms has started to dip. There was a peak in 2012 of 814 farms in the County which, as of 2022, has shrunk to 751.[28] The area seems to be facing an overall trend of farm consolidation partially due to the lack of succession plans and youth interest in farming. However, specialty agriculture like cider, wine, and cheese, for which Vermont is known, remains a strong economic and employment driver.

Job trends seem to align with growing industries. According to one measure of 2024-25 job listings, medical professions are largely in demand, followed by retail workers. See **Figure 4**. This is largely corroborated by another measure from 2020-2025 that indicates similar skill demand growth. See **Figure 5**.

COMMUTING PATTERNS

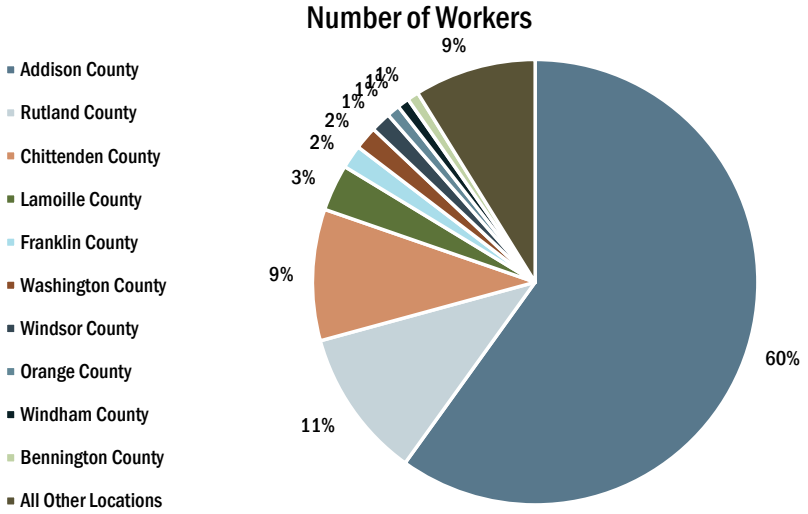
About half of Addison County's 16,564 working residents commute outside of the County, while 5,540 workers travel into the region, bringing Addison County's workforce to 13,824.[29] Of these incoming commuters, most come from Rutland County and Chittenden County then Essex County, New York. While this high rate of county cross pollination boasts the interconnectivity of Vermont, it can be harmful to workers and employers and draws capital from the region. Long commutes



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are linked with worse physical and mental health, including higher rates of obesity, stress, and depression.[30] Employers also suffer from high turnover and employee dissatisfaction, and the public is affected by more air pollution, congestion, and climate change. Commute times are exacerbated by the lack of local, affordable housing, as discussed in the Housing chapter. (See **Figure 6**)

Figure 6: Percentage of Workers in Addison County by County of Residence



GROSS COMMERCIAL SALES AND TAX RECEIPTS

Between 2010 and 2020, annual gross sales receipts in Addison County grew from $667,905,908 to $896,859,096, representing a 13% increase when adjusted for inflation. During this time, annual sales tax receipts grew by 10% when adjusted for inflation, though annual use tax receipts declined by nearly 50%.

Between 2020 and 2023, annual gross sales receipts continued to grow substantially reaching $1,422,136,821 in 2023, representing a 35% increase even after adjusting for inflation. This increase in annual gross sales has helped drive countywide annual sales tax revenue of more than $200,000,000 every year since 2021.[31]

OPPORTUNITY ZONES

Opportunity Zone designation indicates a municipality is a center of regional employment and contains infrastructure that enables future economic growth (e.g., water, sewer, broadband). This designation offers tax benefits to investors who temporarily defer tax on capital gains if they invest those gain amounts in a Qualified Opportunity Fund.[32] The window for capturing these benefits has passed, and the initial Opportunity Zone designation is no longer relevant.

As of 2025, Addison County was home to only one Opportunity Zone, located in Vergennes, that received limited investment during the program's initial iteration. Whereas the original Opportunity Zone program required qualified investments to be made within a specific period of time to qualify for federal tax benefits, the recently approved Opportunity Zones 2.0 program eliminates the time restriction for eligible investments and makes access to the program's federal tax benefits permanent. Designations for new zones are yet to be made by the Governor's office.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is a broad category of economic inputs that can aid or inhabit economic development, from water and wastewater systems to housing and childcare. Vermont has some of the oldest infrastructure in the country, and the Addison Region is no exception. Many systems are in need of replacement, creating a time of urgent necessity for change, and costly investment. This section references many forms of infrastructure that impact Economic Development: Housing, Childcare, Broadband and Telecommunications, Transportation, Trails and Walking Paths, Municipal Water and Wastewater Treatment, Energy, Working Lands, Brownfields, Climate Resilience.

See Chapter 5: Housing; Chapter 4: Community Infrastructure (childcare, broadband and telecommunications, education, municipal water and wastewater); Chapter 3: Transportation; Chapter 2: Energy; Chapter 1: Natural Resources (Working Lands); and Chapter 7: Flood Resiliency for more information on these topics.

HOUSING

Vermont is currently facing a housing crisis. This is especially true in Addison County, where the crisis has accelerated post-COVID. For reference, the median sale price for a home in Addison County largely remained stable at about $200,000 between 2005 and 2015 before rising to approximately $250,000 in 2019. By 2023, the median sales price for a home in Addison County had reached $350,000, representing a roughly 40% increase in just four years. The high price of new homes and scarcity of existing houses has driven up the cost of housing significantly. The Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) estimates an additional 41,184 homes are needed in Vermont by 2030, of which 1,978 are needed in Addison County, to stabilize the housing market and alleviate persistent homelessness. Currently, the county is only on track to build 544.[33]

Housing development has been at the forefront of the legislature with funding and incentives directed towards affordable and market rate building. An example of this is Project-Based Tax Increment Financing (TIF) which passed as part of bill S.127 in the 2025 session. However, this is an uphill battle due to the high cost of development. In 2023, a single apartment in a multifamily building had an average construction cost of $500,000. In fact, construction costs have increased by 30% every year from 2020-23.[34]

Another concern beyond housing development is the preservation of existing housing. Despite increased flooding and unpredictable weather conditions, the Addison Region homes have been fairly resilient. Even manufactured homes, the most vulnerable, have undergone minimal damage. However, houses in the Region are slightly older than the State average, leading to higher maintenance and energy costs. On top of this, the Vermont Housing Needs Assessment estimates that over 4,000 households are cost burdened in the Region.[35] To be cost burdened means that over 30% of the household income goes to housing costs.

A tight housing market has a strong effect on the local economy, from straining the cost of living for residents, to limiting workforce expansion for business. These effects are partially responsible for the rise in homelessness discussed above under Demographics and Workforce. See Chapter 5: Population and Housing for additional information.

CHILDCARE

Access to childcare is a top concern of regional workers. Currently, there is a need for 578 additional childcare slots needed to meet demand. This can be broken down to 295 infants, 138 toddlers, and 145 preschoolers.[36] The Otter Creek Child Center is currently expanding to provide an additional 77 spots, however the problem persists. This issue greatly affects the economy, especially in times of low unemployment, because parents cannot re-enter the workforce with childcare restrictions. See Chapter 4: Community Infrastructure, page 31.

BROADBAND AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Historically, Addison County and Vermont have been behind in internet access. Vermont, ranking 48th in internet speed in 2020, and Addison County having the slowest internet in the West-Central Region.[37] However, great strides have been made bringing 84.73% of residents to the level of fast connection (100/100 Mbps). 14.96% of residents have poor to moderate internet speed (25/3 Mbps or 100/20 Mbps) and just 0.32% are underserved (4/1 Mbps).[38] Connectivity is becoming increasingly important as remote work is a post-COVID norm, consistent with a general trend in the global economy towards high technology dependence. See Chapter 4: Community Infrastructure, pages 12-14.

TRANSPORTATION

The Addison Region is generally served by adequate local roads and state highways, but lacks access to the



interstate highway system, constraining its businesses' ability to access markets. It has a north south rail corridor that provides some access to freight, but lack of local sidings and other infrastructure in addition to supply line delivery demands limit its use.

Route 7 and Route 22A are the most significant driving routes connecting the region to the North and South of Vermont. Route 125 and Route 17 are important East to West connections that reach Central Vermont and New York where many Addison County workers live. Intercounty transportation is vital to a region with an abundance of commuters.

Tri-Valley Transit (**TVT**) is the largest public transportation provider in the area and provides immense support to the county's workforce through commuter routes. Their shuttle buses are ADA accessible public transit for the general public, fare-free. They cover the largest ground North to South of Addison County including: Middlebury, Bristol, New Haven, Vergennes, Salisbury, Leicester, Brandon, Pittsford, Rutland, Starksboro, Hinesburg, Burlington, Shelburne, and Ripton (Middlebury Snow Bowl). Their microtransit services include ADA accessible small vans providing door-to-door rides for the general public, fare-free throughout Middlebury. For vulnerable riders who can't self transport or access the bus system, they run Dial-a-Ride programs. This program is available free, throughout the county, thanks to volunteer drivers. They have several other specialty services (O&D, Medicaid NEMT, Rides to Recovery, and Job Access) for older and disabled riders, as well as those seeking jobs or addiction support services.

Tri-Valley Transit serves Park and Ride facilities in Ferrisburgh (Vergennes border), Hinesburg, Leicester, New Haven, Salisbury, Starksboro and limited service to Bridport, Cornwall, and Monkton. This makes a vital connection between modes of transportation that can reduce individual vehicle use and increase transportation access.

Tri-Valley Transit is a partner of the State's **Go Vermont** network. Go Vermont provides a website and ridesharing database to help commuters and travelers get around. They offer free carpool matching and vanpool services, and statewide bus routes, as well as free Go Vermont resources. The Guaranteed Ride Home Program gives commuters security.



The Region added an AmTrak stop in Middlebury and Vergennes, both in 2022. These extensions provide additional labor transit as well as support for the tourism economy. There is one ferry crossing that connects Shoreham, VT to Ticonderoga, NY. There are a number of small airports in the region. One State airport in Middlebury and three private airstrips in Cornwall, Ferrisburgh, and Vergennes. See Chapter 3, Transportation.

TRAILS AND WALKING PATHS

Interconnected systems of non-motorized trails that link conserved areas to commercial centers provide many economic and health benefits. While access to nature boosts mental and physical health, it is also a draw for tourism and economic activity. Especially when connected to housing, trails can stimulate population and economic growth.

The Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT) mostly maintains and expands the County's largest trail network through its stewardship of 3,500 acres of conserved lands and management of the 19-mile Trail Around Middlebury (TAM). The TAM demonstrates how conservation and recreation can coexist to support quality of life, attract tourism, and sustain the local economy. The trails enhance accessibility and provide direct economic benefit to downtown Middlebury businesses, local accommodations, and outdoor recreation outfitters.

The Green Mountain Club's Long Trail, the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area, and other trail networks within the Green Mountain National Forest provide hiking,

mountain biking, and backcountry experiences that support local tourism. In addition, several partner organizations have developed and maintained an expanding system of multi-use trails that connect communities, support local events, and strengthen Addison County's reputation as an outdoor recreation hub.

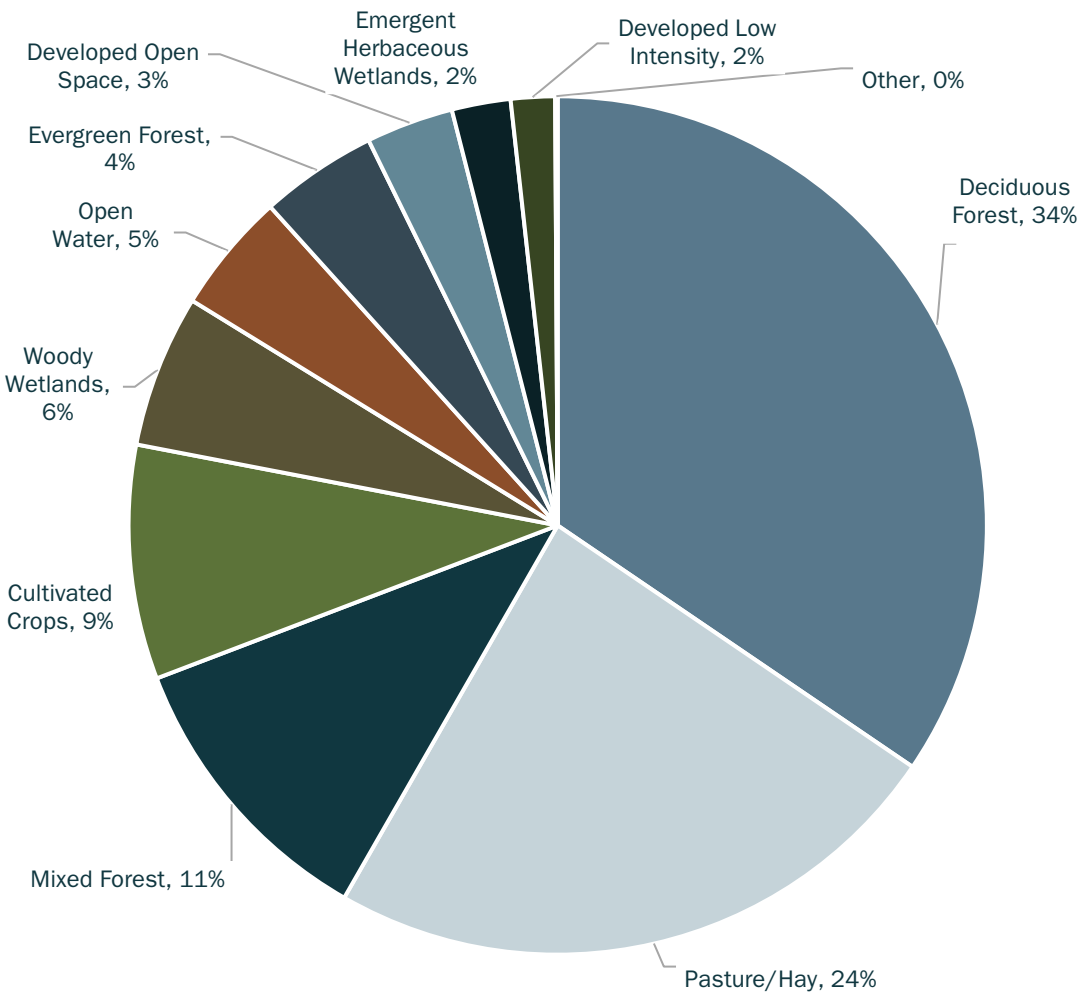
Other areas of the County have a growing emphasis on outdoor recreation. In the village of Bristol, the Bristol Trail Network (BTN) has established roughly 2.7 miles of hiking and multipurpose trail segments in and around downtown. The recent trail advance in Bristol demonstrates how smaller communities can leverage trails for sustainable growth. See Chapter 2: Transportation.

MUNICIPAL WATER AND WASTEWATER TREATMENT

The age of Vermont's infrastructure is reflected in the condition of water and wastewater systems. Currently, Vergennes and Middlebury have wastewater capacity and are in process of improving their wastewater treatment plants. On the other hand, Bristol has no additional municipal capacity. Shoreham, Orwell, and Addison also have small systems with some capacity. Virtually every other community in the Region lacks municipal wastewater systems.

Water systems are more widespread, but many have issues with the ability to provide new services. See Chapter 4: Community Infrastructure. Insufficient water and wastewater systems can stifle economic development. New businesses may choose another community if their needs cannot be met, and expanding businesses may need to relocate. Even more pressing, it will be nearly impossible to add housing in the densities needed to reach our targets without expanded municipal systems.

Figure 7 - Land Cover Types in the Addison Region



Ensuring long-term access to clean water is imperative for a functioning and healthy community. Lake Champlain supplies a few municipal water systems in the county, making its protection essential to the Region. See Chapter 4: Community Infrastructure.

ENERGY

Energy is vital to the economic health of a region. High costs or low access can severely limit growth. Chapter 2: Energy, provides data and insight into Addison County's energy use.

On average, Addison County households spend about 10% of their income on energy costs, which equates to about $7,300 annually. Of the total household energy costs in Addison County, transportation accounts for 45%, heating 33%, and electricity 22%. Nationally, an energy burden greater than 6% is considered high and is correlated with a "greater risk for respiratory diseases, increased stress and economic hardship, and difficulty in moving out of poverty".

Energy burdens affect the workers and the consumers. Lower disposable income means less economic activity. It is not only individuals who suffer from high energy costs, but the business community as well. Every business relies on energy in some form, adding to their operating costs substantially.

There is rising interest in geothermal energy as an alternative to traditional fossil fuels. One community-based version of this is Thermal Energy Networks (TENs). TENs are highly efficient heating and cooling systems that use a network of pipes to interconnect thermal energy resources between multiple buildings. TENs are similar to water and sewer systems in that they support dense, mixed-use development patterns. TENs can be used as an economic development tool in intentional growth centers by providing stable, local energy, and incentivizing relocation. See Chapter 2: Energy.

WORKING LANDS

Land is an important production factor for many industries and has a complex relationship with economic development. While land use for commercial development can often conflict with conservation, Vermont has implemented cross-sector goals that merge interests. Most notably, downtown development is incentivized through tax credits and other funding opportunities while less populated areas are protected. Preservation efforts are elaborated in Chapter 1, Natural Resources. The Addison Region particularly exemplifies this cohesion by maintaining a strong cultural connection to the land through working land enterprises.

The most significant economic tie is agriculture. Addison County is considered the top agricultural county in the State by some measures. Approximately 34% of the land in Addison County is used for agriculture. The region also has the most farms (751) in the State.[39] However, the number of farm operations in Addison declined (-7.7%) between 2012 and 2022 according to the US Agricultural Census as discussed, the Employment by Supersector section.[40] Still, agriculture remains an essential aspect of the County's economy, with the total net cash farm income at $89.8 million.[41]

Economic development can create pressure for land use change. One way that Vermont has resisted undesirable change is the Use Value Assessment (UVA) Program commonly referred to as Current Use. As a mechanism for fair taxation, Current Use enables eligible private landowners who practice long-term forestry or agriculture to have their land appraised based on the property's value of production of wood or food rather than its residential or commercial development value. As of 2023, 42% of land in Addison County was enrolled in Current Use (25% for agriculture and 17% for forestry).[42]

Addison County's working landscape is balanced with the State's desire to permanently conserve portions of land from development. State law, Act 59, which passed in 2023, has a goal of conserving 30% of land by 2030 and 50% by 2050.[43] See Chapter 8: Future Land Use.

BROWNFIELDS

Brownfields are properties whose expansion, redevelopment, or reuse may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. The remediation of contaminated sites has positive environmental and human health impacts while promoting smart land-use practices. Repurposing historically productive properties support infill development and promotes community and economic growth by increasing the tax base and revitalizing blighted areas.

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ACRPC operates a Brownfields program using grant funds obtained from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development. This funding is primarily for assessment-related work, meaning any work related to identifying recognized environmental conditions (RECs) on-site, which can include Regulated Building Materials surveys, Environmental Site Assessments (ESA), supplementary testing, and Corrective Action Plans. Funds for remediation of RECs are currently available from State and Federal sources but not directly from subregional sources.

More than a dozen brownfield properties have been cleaned up in Addison County, mostly in Middlebury and Vergennes, with others dispersed in smaller communities. Locally, these sites are most commonly found in properties with underground storage tanks, like former gas stations, as well as a small number of industrial facilities and dry-cleaning operations. Utilizing recent Community Wide Assessment funding from EPA, ACRPC identified several properties with potential contamination and worked with a consultant to implement assessment work.

ACRPC-funded contractors also conducted Regulated Building Materials testing for Asbestos, Lead, and PCBs for several municipal buildings receiving Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP) grants for building improvements. Two property enrollments in the State Brownfields Reuse Environmental Liability Limitation Program (BRELLA) were funded in order to limit future liability for cleanup.

An Area-Wide Plan was initiated for areas along the Vermont Rail corridor of Ferrisburgh, Vergennes, and Middlebury. This incorporated tax parcels and environmental database factors with historical resources (fire insurance maps) and field observations into a single database that identifies likely brownfields and priorities for additional work.

Consistent funding is critical to continue facilitation of Brownfields property cleanup and redevelopment. This funding has made the initial assessment process accessible and appealing to property owners. In Addison County, many assessments have gone toward public facilities including a community center, library, and opera house. Municipalities would not have the funds otherwise to remediate these essential buildings.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

There have been 12 FEMA Disaster Declarations in Vermont since COVID in 2020. Of those, six involved Addison County. Most extreme weather in the past decade, including these declarations, have been flood related.[44] The Region has experienced increasingly adverse levels of rainfall throughout the seasons. This has had a negative effect on the County's economy. In the event of harsh weather, people are less likely to shop or go downtown. Businesses are often not equipped to handle extreme weather. While some State and Federal resources are available for physical damages, few funds are available to offset the financial damage of closing for repairs or storm-related customer decline.

In the Addison Region, our roads, culverts, bridges, and electrical systems constitute the infrastructure most impacted by disaster. The Addison County Regional Plan supports mitigation efforts including increasing spans of culverts and bridges (as applicable), strategically moving roads, or undergrounding electrical systems where it proves cost-effective to reduce damages and improve function and safety.

Climate resilience requires broad cross-sector collaboration. The Vermont State Climatologist Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux suggests a multi-jurisdictional approach, "ensuring that ALL peoples are at the table from the beginning." Changes in high heat specifically lead to workforce health impacts. Dupigny-Giroux encourages communal multi-use spaces in existing and planned communities to provide ease of access; connectivity of our biking networks for ease of access and safety; and improvements to existing mass transit systems to combat the largest effects of climate change on the economy.[45] See Chapter 7: Flood Resilience.



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Goals, Objectives, and Actions

The Economic Development Chapter of the ACRPC Plan was developed in collaboration with ACEDC. The following list highlights the specific actions for which ACRPC holds primary responsibility. A complete list of all agreed-upon actions can be found in the Chapter 6 Appendix.

GOAL 1: Addison County has a robust and expanding labor force that allows employers in all sectors to hire locally and equitably for positions at every level.

Objective 1:

Addison County's housing stock offers sufficient supply to meet the needs of workers at every income level.

a. Ensure Act 181 future land use mapping maximizes opportunities for developing dense, mixed-income housing in close proximity to jobs and established commercial centers.

b. Launch a project-based tax-increment financing (TIF) program that provides critical financing for infrastructure that supports new housing development.

c. Coordinate with Addison Region municipalities to identify appropriate, shovel-ready development sites that can be actively marketed to housing developers.

d. Support Addison Region municipalities in drafting applications for municipal planning grants to support updates to land use plans and zoning codes that support increased housing development.

e. Assist property owners in securing State Downtown and Village Center tax credits and grants to support small-scale, adaptive reuse infill housing development.

Objective 2:

Ensure local residents have access to responsive, high-quality workforce training aligned with employer needs, through strong partnerships with regional training providers.

a. Collaborate with workforce development partners to support employer-informed training initiatives; facilitate connections through existing networks like Addison County Workforce Alliance (ACWA).

b. Advocate for sustained investment in vocational and technical education infrastructure.

Objective 3:

Increase workforce participation among historically underrepresented groups by connecting them with meaningful employment opportunities in key local sectors.

a. Partner with workforce agencies to implement targeted employment initiatives for youth, adults without diplomas, people with disabilities, and New Americans—ensuring long-term impact through sustained planning and support.

GOAL 2: Addison Region consistently experiences positive annual net growth in the number of small businesses operating in the County and corresponding growth in inflation-adjusted gross sales and sales tax receipts.

Objective 1:

Entrepreneurs experience low barriers to launching a business and receive easy access to technical assistance and financing.

a. Support ACEDC's efforts to assist entrepreneurs in launching and growing businesses by advocating for streamlined administrative processes, improving access to capital, coordinating regional outreach, and connecting entrepreneurs with planning resources, technical assistance, and professional networks.

GOAL 3: Businesses in the Addison Region benefit from robust and resilient conventional infrastructure as well as accessible operational infrastructure.

Objective 1:

The Addison Region offers adequate industrial and commercial facilities to support new and expanding businesses.

a. Support ACEDC in advancing strategic commercial and industrial development across Addison County by collaborating on projects such as the Middlebury Industrial Park Phases II and III, the Firehouse Industrial Park in Bristol, redevelopment along Vergennes' North Main Street corridor, and the exploration of a business incubator focused on agricultural and value-added manufacturing.

b. Pursue the recommendations of the Vergennes Planning and Environmental Linkages Study to improve truck traffic and business conditions in downtown Vergennes.

c. Identify and assess Brownfield sites while pursuing further funding for environmental remediation.

d. Support Maple Broadband and other fiber providers to build an affordable and resilient telecommunications network throughout the Region for individuals and businesses.

Objective 2:

Affordable, sustainable energy sources are accessible for all businesses.

a. Encourage the development of cost-effective, community-scale thermal systems, such as geothermal, Thermal Energy Networks (TEN), and waste heat recovery.

b. Encourage Green Mountain Power (GMP) to make distribution upgrades to support continued renewable generation.

c. Leverage the municipal and energy infrastructure at the Middlebury Industrial Park to attract new and expanding businesses.

d. Develop farm and municipal digesters that produce clean energy, promote the circular economy, and improve water quality.

e. Leverage energy incentives available from energy efficiency utilities and distribution utilities.

Objective 3:

Support the growth and resilience of the Addison Region's producers, manufacturers, and artisans by ensuring they have access to the facilities and distribution systems needed to succeed.

a. Support ACEDC's efforts to retain and strengthen key sectors—such as dairy, forestry, and value-added food production—by expanding access to processing, storage, and shared-use facilities, and by improving distribution networks through shared logistics and enhanced delivery services.

Objective 4:

Expand critical water and wastewater infrastructure in existing villages to support development. Businesses in the Region play an active role in planning and, when appropriate, financing the expansion.

a. Engage manufacturers and large industrial and commercial users in discussions on future infrastructure needs.

b. Advocate for zoning and land use planning that promotes mixed-use development, allowing for commercial and industrial users to absorb the cost for upgraded and expanded infrastructure.



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GOAL 4: High quality of life is regularly cited as the number one reason talent and industry choose to locate and remain in the Addison Region.

Objective 1:

A commitment to equity among businesses, municipalities, and civic organizations ensures Addison County's high quality of life is enjoyed by all residents. This includes strides towards equitable pay regardless of gender.

a. Support ACEDC in refining and expanding its programs to better serve minority and women entrepreneurs by helping establish measurable benchmarks, improve access to capital, and strengthen partnerships with organizations like VPOC and CWE Vermont—ensuring underrepresented populations receive tailored support in business development, market access, and growth opportunities.

b. Support Maple Broadband and other fiber providers to build an affordable and resilient telecommunications network to support continued renewable generation.

Objective 2:

The Addison Region's businesses, municipalities, and civic organizations work together to preserve and expand access to recreational and cultural amenities.

a. Draft a countywide master plan for municipal forests that includes an economic development chapter supporting the Moosalamoo National Recreational Area Master Plan.

b. Investment in trail infrastructure, signage, and maintenance to improve accessibility.

c. Develop a completely interconnected trail network that supports active transportation, recreation, and health while also driving sustainable tourism and business growth.

Objective 3:

A thriving business sector offers residents access to essential goods and services.

a. Support ACEDC in identifying and addressing gaps in Addison County's retail and service sectors by leveraging market data, conducting consumer research, assisting with business recruitment, and promoting coordinated succession planning to ensure continued access to essential goods and services.

Objective 4:

Addison County maintains high ratings for health factors and health outcomes.

a. Advocate for the vital role that health factors play in sustaining a vibrant and effective local workforce.

b. Work with partners in health and health care, through initiatives like Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNA) and Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIP), to assess and design actions that improve economic mobility for our workforce and economic development for our County, while helping control rising healthcare costs.

c. Explore the feasibility of health-based bond programs such as social impact bonds and development impact bonds to drive local investments in health and wellness.

d. Develop promotional campaigns and marketing initiatives that recognize local employers who invest in the health and wellness of employees.

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Exchange Street, Middlebury


Excavation equipment


Sunrise Orchard apple pallets